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Accessibility in the 2018 British Columbia Building Code

This bulletin provides an overview of the changes to the accessibility provisions in the 2018 British Columbia Building Code (BC Building Code) from the previous 2012 edition.

Although the BC Building Code is based on the National Building Code of Canada (NBC), British Columbia's unique accessibility requirements preceded and varied considerably from prior NBC requirements. The 2015 edition of the NBC contains many updates over previous editions to increase accessibility in buildings and is now more closely aligned with the requirements and approaches of most Canadian jurisdictions, including those of British Columbia (B.C.).

The Province of B.C. is committed to making buildings more accessible for persons with disabilities. The 2018 BC Building Code requires a greater level of building accessibility by combining the requirements of the 2015 NBC with B.C.'s historical requirements. In aligning more closely with the NBC, the BC Building Code achieves greater consistency not only with the NBC, but also with codes from other Canadian jurisdictions. This enhances B.C.'s ability to integrate new accessibility provisions from other leading jurisdictions into future codes.

A new Building Access Handbook is being developed to guide code users through the accessibility provisions of the 2018 BC Building Code.

New Definitions in the 2018 BC Building Code

Access or *accessible* means an area and its facilities, or both, as required by this Code, which is easy to approach, enter, exit, operate, participate in, pass to and from, and use safely and independently by *persons with disabilities*.

Persons with disabilities means persons who have a permanent or temporary physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

New Organization and Approach

The 2018 BC Building Code follows the organization and approach of the 2015 NBC. Section 3.8. of Division B, which contains accessibility requirements for buildings, is arranged as follows:

Subsection 3.8.1. provides the scope of the BC Building Code's requirements for access.

Subsection 3.8.2. establishes the application of accessible design requirements (found in Subsection 3.8.3.) to spaces and facilities.

Subsection 3.8.3. establishes the design criteria for what is required of a space or facility in order to be considered 'accessible'.

Subsection 3.8.4. determines the minimum requirements for providing access during alterations or additions to existing buildings.

Subsection 3.8.5. contains the requirements for adaptable dwelling units.

Common criteria are now grouped in related provisions. For example, code users will now find a single application statement directing them to single design criteria, such as for spaces designated for wheelchair use in rooms or areas with fixed seats.

Many references to other requirements in the Building Code have also changed. Much of the content has been reorganized within Section 3.8. Some examples include:

- Article 3.8.3.19. in the 2012 BC Building Code which addresses the protection of accessible floor areas now appears as Article 3.3.1.7. in the 2018 BC Building Code
- Requirements for doors providing access that appeared in Article 3.3.1.13. of the 2012 BC Building Code now appear in Article 3.8.3.6. of the 2018 BC Building Code
- Provisions for accessible washrooms that appeared in Article 3.7.2.10. of the 2012 BC Building Code are now contained in Subsection 3.8.3.

New Spaces Requiring Access

Some spaces where access was not previously required must now provide access. For example, **apartment and condominium buildings** that only required interior access between the main entrance and the elevator must now provide access throughout all common areas, when the building is served by an elevator (access into and throughout dwelling units is still not required). **Small shops and stores** that had a total retail floor space of less than 50 m² were previously exempted from providing access; however, the 2018 BC Building Code does not contain this exemption.

In the 2018 BC Building Code, where a space is required to be accessible, 50 percent of the **pedestrian entrances** to spaces must be made accessible. This may result in greater use of power operated doors at more accessible entrances.

B.C.'s requirement that access be available throughout the building is continued, and the 2018 BC Building Code contains some specific requirements for how that is to be achieved. There is specific language for providing an accessible path of travel which starts outside the building and ends at each location where there is a feature or service to be used by persons with disabilities. Where controls are intended for occupant use such as light and intercom switches, such controls shall be accessible.

A greater proportion of **viewing spaces** for persons using wheelchairs shall be provided in assembly occupancies with fixed seats.

The 2018 BC Building Code places increased attention on connections to and from buildings. An accessible path of travel shall connect a sidewalk, roadway, or street to an accessible entrance. When provided, parking areas and passenger-loading zones shall be connected by an accessible path of travel.

The 2018 BC Building Code requires visible warning systems in all **accessible sleeping rooms and bed spaces** in addition to a portion of others.

Historical requirements for **parking spaces** are not maintained in the 2018 BC Building Code. The 2012 BC Building Code parking requirements do not address the variety of considerations for either loading/unloading vehicles, or for local planning requirements. Many local authorities have already established parking requirements that address accessible parking stalls, and there are also other standards and guidance documents available for designers such as the CSA B651, "Accessible Design for the Built Environment" standard.

New Design Requirements

The 2018 BC Building Code offers the **CSA B651, “Accessible Design for the Built Environment”** standard as an option for design of certain applications. Designers may choose to follow design criteria contained in the BC Building Code (in Subsection 3.8.3.), or follow the design criteria in the CSA B651 standard.

The 2018 BC Building Code also requires a minimum level of **illumination** for an accessible path of travel, and doorways located in an accessible path of travel must have a **clear width** of not less than 850 mm. Power door operators that are not designed to operate automatically must be operable by touch or approach of a fist, arm, or foot. **Foot-operated controls** are new to the 2018 BC Building Code.

Limited-use / limited-application elevators, also referred to as LU/LA elevators, are permitted as passenger elevating devices and are exempted from the minimum elevator car dimensions (to accommodate a patient stretcher) in Article 3.5.4.1.

In assembly occupancies, classrooms and meeting rooms with an area over 100 m², as well as all courthouses, shall be equipped with assistive listening systems.

The 2018 BC Building Code contains specific language on the location and **placement of signage** to avoid shadows and glare; however, the specific language on stroke and font of characters is moved to the Notes as guidance (rather than as an enforceable part of the BC Building Code) to allow flexibility of design.

There are changes to **grab bar** design criteria with regards to required lengths and locations of grab bars. For example, an L-shaped grab bar must be adjacent to accessible water closets.

There are new illustrations in the Notes to demonstrate the application of accessible provisions. The complete content of Section 3.8. of Division B of the 2018 BC Building Code, with all new application and design criteria (including commentary), will be made available in the Building Access Handbook.

Links

- Building a Better B.C. for People with Disabilities: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/about-the-bc-government/accessibility>
- Ministry website: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/construction-industry/building-codes-standards>
- Table on [Where to Find B.C.-Specific Provisions by Code Reference](#)

Contact the Building and Safety Standards Branch

- **General** inquiries can be sent to building.safety@gov.bc.ca
- **Technical** Code inquiries can be sent to codequestion@gov.bc.ca

The Building and Safety Standards Branch does not enforce compliance with the BC Building Code. Local governments are authorized to enforce the BC Building Code through the Local Government Act and the Community Charter.